Christ seen in the Stranger.

A SERMON,

PREACHED IN THE CATHEDRAL CHURCH OF ST. JAMES, TORONTO, CANADA WEST,

ON THE EVENING OF

ST. GEORGE'S DAY, 1860,

ON BEHALF OF THE

ST. GEORGE'S SOCIETY

BY

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MATTHEW, *Chap.* XXV. *part of verse* 35.—"I WAS A STRANGER, AND YE TOOK ME IN."

We must often have felt, my brethren, that the words of Holy Writ, more especially those of our blessed Lord Himself, are so pregnant with meaning and so forcible in expression, that any attempt to explain or illustrate them, seems to diminish rather than increase their force. They are, as it were, the few bold strokes in a picture sketched in by a master hand, which tell their own tale better than the more elaborate production of an inferior artist, and the effect of which is to a great extent destroyed, if it be given to another to throw in the light and shade and work up the colouring. And so it is this evening, brethren, that I feel as if I could gladly leave to your Christian sympathy and charity, the claims of that Society whose cause I have to plead with you, with nothing but our Lord's own words to recommend them: "I was a Stranger and ye took Me in; forasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." I cannot but feel that any remarks of mine can add but little to your understanding of words so appropriate to the occasion as these, but may rather weaken the effect upon your minds of teaching so forcible and so plain.

But yet, when I consider the cause which I have

to bring before your notice, which solicits your Christian consideration by touching at once two of the most sensitive chords in our hearts, namely pity for a stranger, and love to a brother, inasmuch as it relates to those who are not only in one sense strangers, but in another our own brethren and fellow-countrymen; a cause therefore which does not depend for its acceptance with you upon the ability and eloquence of the advocate; when I consider this, I am emboldened to avail myself of my privilege this evening, to dwell for awhile upon the words of the text, with no fear that your response will not be liberal, but with a sincere wish and prayer that your offerings may be made in a spirit which will benefit yourselves, no less than those to whose needs you contribute.

I have chosen for my subject our Lords own words, it is no lesser Advocate who is to plead with you today. And they are spoken when He was describing a very solemn scene, perhaps the most solemn one which is depicted in Woly Hrit, even the judgment at the last day.

The Son of Man is come in His glory, and all His holy Angels with Him. The rainbow like unto an emerald is round about the throne, and He sits in His Majesty, and before Him are gathered all nations to receive the verdict of their Judge. A separation is made now that was not made on earth, between the righteous and the wicked, as a shepherd divideth his sheep from the goats. The sheep are on the right hand, the goats are on the left. And what is it that the mighty King, the everlasting Councillor, the righteous Judge, has to say to the race of His faithful ones? What is it that *He* commends in His

Saints, in Whose sight the Heavens are not clean and the very Angels are charged with folly? "Then shall the King say unto them on His right hand 'Come ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was an hungered and ye gave Me meat, I was thirsty and ye gave Me drink, I was a stranger and ye took Me in, naked and ye clothed Me, I was sick and ye visited Me, I was in prison and ye came unto Me.'" And then in answer to their enquiry how or when they, the vast assemblage of all the nations of the earth, had ministered to Him, our Lord adds; "Forasmuch as ye have done it unto the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me."

Now, my friends, if we had never heard this before, it would strike us as a very wonderful sentence, and a very wonderful answer. And even now when we come to think of it, how much of truth seems wrapped up in it. It shews us that we are living for this judgment now, and how we are living for it in our daily acts; that our state hereafter depends upon how we behave ourselves here, and that not so much in great matters as in small. It shews us in short, that while salvation is by grace through faith, judgment and reward are measured to us by our works. Nature itself points out to us that good and bad deeds are followed by a righteous retribution. And that which Nature could only partially shew by hint and inference, Revelation has taught us on the authority of God.

But yet when our Lord in his capacity of inspired Teacher of the sons of men, explained as He did on this and a few other occasions, the principles on which His judgment was to be based, how simple though how searching does it all appear.

It is not "Ye have had faith which would remove mountains, ye have had a deep insight into the mysteries of religion." It is not "Ye have had strong and impassioned feelings, highly wrought convictions, manifold experiences," which many in our day would teach to be the very essence of religion, and the only test whether we have it or no. However indispensable to the sinner, if he would be saved, the conviction of sin; and the firm grasp of faith on the promises of God; and the reaching onward of hope after a crown of immortality; and the reasonable assurance of a Christian man who knows that Christ has redeemed him, and believes that He will not cast out him whom He has redeemed: however all these I say must enter in various ways into the Christian's life, they do not in themselves form the test of acceptance with God. By their fruits are they known. This is the proof whether faith be really faith, and not self-delusion; whether hope be really Christian hope, not presumptuous confidence or careless indifference; and whether the warm feeling, the passionate longing, the religious excitement, be the kindling of a holy and healthful zeal, or the frenzy of an unholy feverish madness.

Nor again even is it "Ye have converted many souls to Me, have had peculiar and signal intellectual or spiritual gifts, have spoken with tongues and prophesied, and done wonderful works in the name of Christ." Special gifts and powers are indeed to be valued by those who have them, and they are for the strengthening and building up of Christ's Church. It is moreover incumbent upon us to use the talents committed to us, be they many or be they few. But the final trial is something which is in common with

the highly gifted, and the less favoured servants of God; something which puts on an equality the man with lofty intellect, capable of investigating laws, tracking truth, and mastering sciences; and the unlettered one who scarcely knows his right hand from his left. It makes little difference to exist between one of high spiritual knowledge, and deep religious feelings; and one who knows little more than that man sinned, and Christ died to save, and God loves, and the Holy Spirit sanctifies the people of God. Our Lord says, "Ye have fed the hungry, and satisfied the wants of the thirsty, and ministered to the stranger, and clothed the naked. Ye have done it to My brethren, and therefore ye have done it unto Me."

It sounds so little that the Saints can scarcely believe what they have done. They ever feel that all that they can do is nothing. Their left hand knoweth not what their right hand doeth, often knoweth not that it hath done any thing. They are ever asking themselves and God, as they are represented doing here: "When did we these things? How is it that God can look with favour on the imperfect efforts of the sons of men." The more they strive to do of His will, the less do they seem to do. The more they perform of their duty, the more do they seem to leave undone. The clearer knowledge they gain of the path of duty in which they ought to walk, the further does it seem to stretch away before them, and they to be taking a few feeble steps along a road, the end of which is lost in the infinite distance.

And yet notwithstanding this, God accepts them as good and faithful servants according to that they have. He knows their frame and their weakness, and their struggles, and how they are beset round

about, and how their foes are strong, and their flesh is weak. And what he asks of them is to do what they can; *to live in faith in Christ and love to the brethren;* to see in every hungering and thirsting man, Him who hungered and thirsted for them; in every stranger, Him who for them was a stranger among His brethren, and had not where to lay His head.

And this leads us, my brethren, to the consideration that these duties are here said to be done to Christ Himself. This, and this alone, is the reason why they are pleasing to God. "I was a stranger and ye took Me in." It is not you will observe, "Ye have ministered to the brethren and that is pleasing to Me;" but more than this, "Ye have ministered to Me."

This it is that distinguishes real Christian charity from the results of mere good nature, or a desire not to be outdone in liberality, or the pressure of some other exciting cause. This is the test that divides those on the right hand from those on the left. Perhaps they do, to a great extent, the same things, as far as appearance goes. There is a good deal of spurious liberality, imitation of charity in the world. A Christian man, for example, is not more likely than another to appear as contributing largely on a subscription list, to an object of charity, perhaps less so, since the Christian does not his alms to be seen of men. Those on the left hand you observe are represented as saying "When saw we Thee in need and did not succour Thee?" We have no means now of separating between really good and apparently good actions. The difference is this, the love of Christ constraineth to the one, and it is something else which constraineth to the other.

Things done to Christ for the faith and love of Him, are pleasing and acceptable to God. Christ is One with His brethren. He is the Head and they are the Members, and ministering to one Member is ministering to the Body. Yes, my brethren, Christ is One with His brethren. In ministering to them we are reminded of Him, we are following His example, we are doing what He approves, but more than all, we are ministering to *Himself*.

Let us consider two ways in which Christ is one with men, which shew that by no mere figure of speech does He thus transfer to Himself those deeds of love which are done to the brethren.

Now, first, He is one with us in nature and condition. He is here called not only the great King, but the Son of Man. This title He ever takes to Himself as if it belonged in some peculiar way to Him; as if it were the title which it was most wonderful that He should have. That the Saviour of men should be the mighty God; one by mysterious ineffable union with Him who made the world and man, and one in Council and in Substance with Him who planned the restoration of the one, and the salvation of the other; *this* would seem on account of the power requisite to bring these mighty effects about, almost less wonderful than that He should be Man. And yet there was the necessity that obedience to God should be rendered by Man in order that Man might be able to obey; that expiation for Man's sins should be offered by Man in order that men might be forgiven by God; and that temptation should be overcome by a Man, who like Adam could feel temptation, but unlike Adam would not be conquered by it. He Himself the "second Adam," the "everlasting Father"

of the children of the regeneration, proved at once His Godhead and His Manhood by power on the one hand and weakness on the other, in a way level to the understanding, and forcible to the hearts of all.

When God in His mercy had planned the salvation of a fallen world, at the fulness of time His only Son came down from Heaven to earth, to teach and to save mankind. God is come into the world to save men; where is He to be found?

Those who look for the mighty Deliverer from Heaven, whom Type and Prophecy and Heavenly Sign had gone before, and whose Advent myriads of Angels wait upon, are led to the lowly Babe lying in the manger of an inn at Bethlehem; to the humble cottage at Nazareth; to the assembly of the Doctors where the Jewish child answered to His faith; to the carpenter's bench. Later on He is found with fishermen in Galilee, on the Lake of Tiberias, or coming up with His brethren to the Feast at Jerusalem. He taught in the Temple and in the Synagogue. He had words of instruction for Nicodemus a "Master in Israel," and did not disdain to address His gracious doctrine to the publican and the sinner. None could feel that He cut Himself off from them. It was their own fault if He had not for all the teaching which their needs required. He was much with the family at Bethany, each member of which He loved. He wept over the grave of one of them even when about to restore him to life. His first miracle was wrought at a wedding, but more often was He found with those that weep. He was "a Man of Sorrows." Exercising the power of God in healing and feeding others, He felt to the full the weakness of man in His own person, using no miracle to supply His own

needs. He hungered and thirsted in the flesh, in order to preach to the poor, and wandered as a stranger to seek those who were wandering as strangers from the fold of God. And yet though there was so much that might seem on the one hand to further and on the other to hinder His teaching, He as man spoke rather to the hearts of a few; and whilst His miracles testified to His mission, He taught men to love Him first as *Man*.

And at the last, when led as a lamb to the slaughter, He was mindful even to tears of the fate of his beloved Jerusalem: He felt from the full depth of His man's heart for the women who followed Him, saying to them "weep not for Me, but weep for yourselves and for your children;" and lastly from the Cross itself He gave to His mother, whose heart a sword was piercing, a son in the disciple whom he loved.

Do not these and many other touches of nature which I could recall to your minds did time permit, tell us of the *Man*: do they not teach us that He Himself "took part of the same" flesh and blood of which the children of men are partakers; that in His Manhood, and in His condition there, He is one with His suffering Members upon earth.

But again He is one with us by grace. As he is one with the Father, so by the Comforter are his people to be one with His Father and Himself. "As thou Father art in Me, and I in Thee, that they also may be one in Us." Wonderful mystery! The Holy Spirit is one Person of the Triune God, and yet lives in the hearts of men. This Spirit it is that binds men to Him; that makes those who believe in Him *one* with Him. He would be but another man, of the most perfect type indeed, but still only another man, were it not

for this most mysterious bond. His perfect obedience and sympathy would be something which we could admire and feel, but which would have no intimate relation to ourselves. It would, except in degree, be but like the obedience and sympathy of any other man. But now we are made Members incorporate in the Body of Christ. By the Spirit it is that we have access to the Father in union with Christ, through faith, by the Sacraments, by Prayer, and the other means of grace. His obedience is reckoned to us, His suffering is accepted for us. All are made alive in Him. All will rise again, because Christ has risen. The Spirit is our Life, our Strength. Through Him we partake of the Life of Christ. He pleads with us, and in us, and is at hand to give us His aid, and lead us to holiness.

And now my friends, I have tried to point out briefly to you how Christ is one with his brethren: one, inasmuch as he is Man like themselves; one, inasmuch as by the Comforter they are united to His glorified Person: one, because while on the one hand He took the form of a servant; on the other He has thus taken the Manhood into God.

I have done this lest you should think that doing kind actions to your neighbours will of itself give you a seat in the Kingdom of God; and lest you should suppose that it is the deed itself which is accepted by God, rather than the motive from which it springs, namely, faith and love to Christ.

The question with each man is, "Do you love Christ?" Do your acts of benevolence and charity spring from a love to Him Who has redeemed you? Does your love for your brother proceed from your love to Christ and God?

Do you shew your love to God, Whom you have not seen, by your love to your brother, whom you have seen?

Then if so, in ministering to your brother's wants, you are ministering to Christ; in doing your duty to your neighbour, you are doing your duty to God. Do what is right, and do it from right motives; that is true religion. If you can humbly hope that to some extent this is your case, many are the exceeding great and precious promises to those who supply the wants of the stranger; to those who "do good and distribute," with whom "God will be well pleased;" to those "who lend to the Lord" in their "pity for the poor," believing that what they "lay out shall be paid them again;" to those who "minister to the saints," knowing that "God is not unrighteous to forget their works and labour that proceedeth of love."

See what the beloved disciple St. John saith, where in few touching words the lessons are summed up which I have now tried to set before you: "Whatsoever we ask we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight. And this is His commandment, That we should *believe on the name of His son Jesus Christ, and love one another* as He gave us commandment. And he that keepeth His commandments dwelleth in Him, and He in him. And hereby *we know that He abideth in us, by the Spirit which He hath given us.*

But yet, my brethren, I must remind you that there is another side to the picture. There are those who will say in agony of soul: "When saw we Thee and did not minister to Thee: we have eaten and drunk

in Thy presence, and Thou hast taught in our streets." To whom the Judge will say, "I never knew you. I was a stranger and ye took me not in; ye let me remain ever a stranger to you. I knocked at the door of your hearts, and you would not let me in. I would have supped with you, but you would not receive me." Oh! my friends, are there any such here to-night. You have heard of Christ, read of Him, perhaps even pray to Him, and use His Name when you pray. You are His servants in *name*, but do you *know* Him? Is He a stranger to you in *fact*? Do you hear His voice? Do you open to Him the door when He knocks? If not, delay no longer in giving your hearts to Him. He is the only one who can save you from your sins; who will by the Holy Ghost, the Comforter, be your Life, your Strength. He is one with you; He knows your wants, and has borne your sins and sorrows. Oh! consider the fearful sentence which the Judge here pronounces on those who are content to live in carelessness, or rest in fair outward show. A cup of cold water to one of Christ's little ones, given because he belongs to Christ, will not lose its reward; but all your goods may be given to feed the poor, and yet for lack of Christian charity may profit nothing.

I could not ask your alms to day, my friends, without a word of caution, that your offering be not elicited by any other motive than love to Christ, and love to His brethren. But yet I can now beg you in His Name to do what you are able. To many of us, to the preacher, as well as to yourselves, may be applied the words of Moses: "Ye know the heart of a stranger, seeing that ye were strangers in the land." Many of us know, perhaps the majority of the mem-

bers of the St. George's Society know, what it is to be in a new world, without the smile of a friend's face, or the touch of a well-known hand, or the cordial accents of welcome. They know the blank look that every thing had, when they had nothing to look at that they had ever seen before. Many of us for various reasons, have left old ties and associations that seem twined round our hearts, and part of our very selves; and though we were here in presence, we felt as if we had left the greater part of us behind. And what must this be, my friends, to the stranger, if the new world does not use him well, or if through his own misfortune the venture that he has made does not succeed. What must it be, if to the feeling of strangeness, be added the pinching of poverty, the miseries of want. And how must the stranger's heart be lifted up within him, how will he thank God and take courage, if both these miseries be removed at once;—if the poor needy English emigrant is met with the hearty response of the St. George's Society, "You are not a stranger; you are among English hearts. Christ loved His own Jerusalem, and if we forget our Zion let our right hands forget their cunning, and if even in our mirth we prefer it not, let our tongues cleave to the roofs of our mouths. You are a stranger no longer,—you are among brothers. You shall not perish for want. For the love of Christ, and for the scarcely less holy love of our country, we will minister to you of our abundance." "No man ever yet hated his own flesh, but loveth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the Church."

I need hardly say much on such a subject as this. For particulars of the efficient working of this noble institution I will refer you to the printed report.

Suffice it to say that it has been the means of assisting numerous deserving cases, and that its funds have been spent with judgment, and to the best advantage. Perhaps many of you saw the Christmas distribution, when more than nine tons of provisions were served out to the poor, through the agency of this Society, to the value of nearly 500 dollars. Surely this good old English way of keeping the feast at which we call to mind our Blessed Saviour's coming as a man upon earth, was a right way of shewing love to Him. All of you will respond to the noble boast of the Society, that while the charity is intended for the English poor, yet to the really deserving no difference was made; no case of real want sent away. There is a wider brotherhood, even than that of Englishmen, as we in this country ought to know. Let it be ever thus; and provoke one another to love, and to good works, remembering that "The liberal deviseth liberal things, and by liberal things shall he stand."